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BOOK REVIEWS.

SOME PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy. By William James. London, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1911. Pp. xii, 237.

“Say it is fragmentary and unrevised. Call it ‘a beginning of an introduction to philosophy.’ Say that I hoped by it to round out my system, which now is too much like an arch built only on one side” (pp. vii *f.*) These are the words with which the author described his own work when, after a prolonged struggle against ill health and various distractions, he directed the publication of the unfinished manuscript. To complete it, the editor tells us, had become toward the end of his life his dearest ambition, but precisely one month before his death he was forced to abandon the task. Two copies of the work were left, and these had already been revised separately, but the changes differed, the editor states, only in matters of detail. At the request of the author, the two copies were compared, and the manuscript prepared for the press, largely by his friend and pupil, Dr. H. M. Kallen. Henry James, Jr., is the editor.

It is a matter of profound regret that the author’s purpose to bring his scattered utterances upon metaphysics into a more systematic form should thus have been frustrated, for the result could not have been otherwise than enlightening. A thinker of great germinative force such as James, who touched contemporary life at a vast number of points and who stimulated men of so many stripes of opinion and character, could not have brought his philosophical ideas into systematic juxtaposition without illuminating the tangled skein of our contemporary intellectual life. Even though no radically new ideas had appeared,—and this perhaps was scarcely to be expected,—the order in which his matured views might have unrolled themselves, the emphasis of this point and the subordination of that, would certainly have proved helpful to us and perhaps doubly significant to the future biographer of James or to the historian of the thought of the twentieth century.

Even as the work stands, its significance in this respect can be discerned. The point is not merely that some of its chapters are as good philosophical discussion as James ever wrote, though

this is undoubtedly true; the chapters on the Infinite (X and XI) are probably not surpassed by anything in his philosophical works. Nor is it that the mellowness and urbanity of this latest and most mature product of his pen reflect more clearly than his other works the beautiful personal character of the man, though this also is true. It is rather that the problem which James here puts in the foreground is admirably adapted to bring to light what may well be regarded as the most imperative task of contemporary philosophy. This problem is discussed under the caption of Percept and Concept, and in his theory of conception is to be found the root of James's logical and metaphysical views. If this be found true, the corollaries,—his pluralism and alogism,—must be accepted. The importance of putting this problem foremost and the value of James's discussion of it are unquestionable whether his results are accepted or not. It is the prerogative of a great man to teach even by his errors, and this must be our excuse for dwelling upon what seem to us the difficulties of James's method.

The striking feature of his theory of perception and conception is his radical separation of the two: throughout the book the emphasis is laid constantly upon the 'clash' of the empirical and the rational. Conception and perception are defined as opposites; each is what the other is not. They are intermingled, indeed, in our ordinary experience, but they are different because they vary independently; brutes have a life of feeling as copious as ours, but only a minimum of thought (p. 47). Percepts are continuous and concepts are discrete (p. 48). Perception is an ever changing flux; a concept never varies (p. 53). The perceptual flux as such means nothing; it is merely what it immediately is. Conception, on the other hand, is nothing except meaning; its nature is to symbolize and what it is in itself is a matter of little moment so far as its representative function is concerned (*cf.* p. 59). Perception is concrete and 'full'; conception is abstract and 'thin' (p. 78). Perception is full of dynamic relations; conception has no relations except those of static comparison (p. 81). The essence of the perceptual flux is the constant introduction of novelty (*cf.* pp. 154*f.*); "conception knows no way of explaining save by deducing the identical from the identical" (p. 152). Intellection is the "substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which . . . experience originally comes" (p. 51), and hence the intel-

lect can never do justice to the changing and the novel. It translates it into static terms and leaves it dead and cold. Conception is thus secondary to perception and not only omits but falsifies it (p. 79). Perception and conception, then, are virtually distinct and contrasting faculties. It is indeed true that James more than once points out that in fact the two are not separable except by a violent effort of abstraction; in ordinary experience only the most rigid retrospection can determine what elements belong to each (pp. 107ff.). Nevertheless, this concrete experience, filled as it is with representative and symbolic elements, is always counted to the credit of perception, while conception, in spite of its practical usefulness, is charged with all the contradictions and disharmonies. In fact, James does not hesitate to call conception "a faculty superadded to our barely perceptual consciousness for its use in practically adapting us to a larger environment than that of which brutes take account" (pp. 64f.). James's theory turns upon the disparate-ness of the two faculties; conception is hopelessly self-contradictory and must therefore be regarded as the handmaid of perception, which always speaks the last word regarding concrete reality (pp. 96f.). The two are said, indeed, to supplement one another and both are said to be essential to 'knowledge' (p. 81, note), but the supplementation of perception by conception results only in making experience practically useful at the expense of making it incomprehensible (p. 78).

Forced as the comparison may sound, James's way of attacking his problem is strikingly like Kant's, and it is difficult to see why the objections raised against the latter do not apply also to the former. Both define perception and conception by contrast, and both, while admitting the invariable presence of both factors in experience, regard experience as an aggregation of the two. Both regard conception as fatally self-contradictory and both declare an alogical solution of the problem to be necessary. In both cases, moreover, the same postulate appears to underlie the method, though neither thinker avows it in set terms,—*viz.*, the assumption that there is such a thing as perception or conception *as such*, a sort of essential perception or conception which is always and everywhere the same. An assumption of this sort appears to be inseparable from the method of regarding experience as a mixture of the two, the one being super-added to the other. James so often criticized Kant for this sort

of artificiality that it is very remarkable to note the degree in which his own theory is permeated with it, and this is the more remarkable in a pragmatist and a thinker filled with the spirit of evolution. Surely, it is radically non-evolutionary to assume that thinking is necessarily of one type only; the presumption would be far more natural that the 'substitution of the conceptual for the perceptual order' might be differently accomplished, and lead to different results, according to the varying characteristics of the subject-matter and the varying purposes which dictate such a substitution. With all its faults,—and they were legion,—the Hegelian dialectic had a truer insight into the actual complexities of the conceptual processes than this, for it at least was founded upon the belief that thinking has manifold forms rather than one single self-identical type.

The truth appears to be that James never entirely escaped from the crassly utilitarian form of statement in which pragmatism first expressed itself, though throughout this volume he has been careful to bracket thinking itself with the practical ends which thought may subserve (*cf.*, *e. g.*, p. 59). The one end which he seriously regards concepts as achieving is adaptation to the physical environment, and the test of conceptual thinking is regarded as the capacity to predict a result before it occurs. Hence the cases on which his description of conceptual thought is based are drawn mostly from the mathematical and mechanical sciences, and in these sciences it would be generally agreed that thought 'deduces the identical from the identical.' It is not obvious, however, that all thinking is and must be of this type. There are sciences, *e. g.*, history, in which prediction plays no rôle and in which there is no tendency to reduce the subject-matter to qualitatively identical elements. Yet history is a conceptual system, or at all events it is certainly not perception. It is the result of selection, of the emphasis of some events and the suppression of others, with a view to the production of a comprehensible whole. Nor does the fact that it deals with past time prove that its categories are necessarily static and discrete (*cf.* p. 167). And what is true of history is true in varying degrees of other departments of knowledge. It is by no means obvious that static discreteness is the only realm in which conceptual thought can move and that it inevitably falsifies every subject-matter in which development and continuity are essential to comprehension.

James's solution of philosophical contradictions is determined by the assumed 'clash' between the perceptual and the conceptual, the empirical and the rational, which is 'emphasized throughout the volume' (p. 37). "Use concepts when they help, and drop them when they hinder understanding; and take reality bodily and integrally up into philosophy in exactly the perceptual shape in which it comes" (p. 95),—this is the 'simple' remedy proposed. But does it, as a matter of fact, present any clear conception whatever of a philosophical method? If it means that conception cannot be made a substitute for perception, as James often puts it, no one will disagree. But if it means literally that philosophy is in part a scientific, conceptual system and in part 'reality taken bodily,' the statement is surely incomprehensible. Such a program is no better, if no worse, than the conception of Hegel's dialectic as a process of creating reality from logical categories. As James himself says, philosophy is essentially 'talkative'; that is to say, essentially discursive and communicable. Moreover, it is first and foremost a technical, scientific discipline, as truly as any physical science. What constitutes its serious task, James as much as any man of this generation has shown. It is not to eke out thought with feeling, but to discover by careful scientific analysis the processes by which thinking goes on. This task is radically empirical, as James says, for the nature of conceptions can be discovered only by thorough genetic and analytic study of the situations in which they are used. In this way only is it possible to 'delimit the scope of perception and conception, showing how, as our experience works, they supplement each other' (p. 93). Anything less than this is false to the spirit of pragmatism, false to the best that James himself has sought to teach this generation of philosophical scholars, false, for example, to such painstaking work as the discussion of the Infinite in the present volume. James and pragmatism have brought not peace, but a sword,—not easy reconciliations by feeling of difficulties made by our own bad postulates, but scientific analysis to the bitter end, not of conception in general, but of particular working conceptions as they work. When this is done, the quarrel between empiricist and intellectualist, absolutist and pluralist, will either have vanished or have taken a new and more fruitful form.

GEORGE H. SABINE.

Leland Stanford, Jr., University.